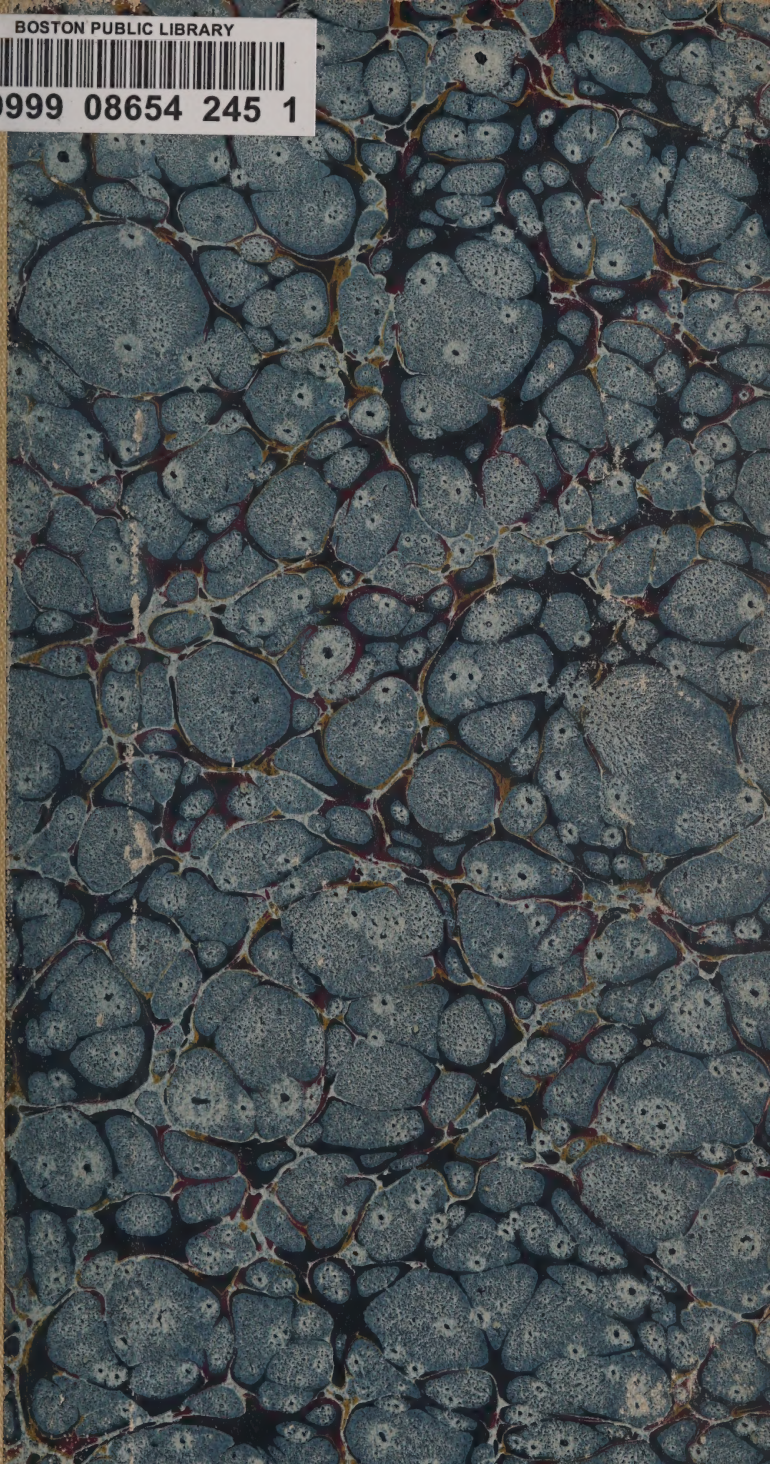
BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 08654 245 1



№ 4588.252

GIVEN BY

Boston Young Mens Christian Union

JAN 14 H

WHAT CONVERTED ME

BY

7588.252

CHARLES F. DOLE

PRINTED BY
THE UNITARIAN TEMPERANCE SOCIETY
BOSTON

TEMPERANCE PUBLICATIONS.

The New View. By Rev. C. F. Dole.
The Temperance Puritan. By Rev. Edward E. Hale, D.D.
How I became a Total Abstainer. By Mrs. L. Ormiston Chant.
Keep Things Stirred up. By Mrs. Mary A. Livermore.
Address on Temperance. By William Ellery Channing.
Don't Smoke. Dedicated to our American boys by Rev. A. A. Livermore.
Don't Drink. Dedicated to our American boys by Rev. A. A. Livermore.
Intemperance in its Relation to Social Ills. By Mrs. Anna Garlin Spencer.
The Man who never cried. A Story for Children.
Temperance and Purity: What our Young People can do for them. By Rev. Brooke Herford, D.D.
Mistakes about Abstainers. By Canon Farrar.
A Temperance Message from the Church to Young Men. By Rev. Caroline J. Bartlett.
The Worship of the Ivy. By a Norwegian Traveller.
The Siberian Toboggan Slide. By Rev. C. F. Dole.
What Converted me. By Rev. C. F. Dole.
A Plain Question of Personal Duty. By Rev. Earl M. Wilbur.
Some World Aspects of the Temperance Question. Observations in England, France, Germany, Africa, and India. By Rev. J. T. Sunderland.
Need a Traveller drink Wine? By Rev. J. T. Sunderland.
Envelope Series of Temperance Ideas. No. 1, "For their Sake." No. 2, "Personal Purity," by Rev. Edward E. Hale, D.D. No. 3, "Running the Gauntlet," by Mrs. Mary A. Livermore. No. 4, "What One can Do," by Rev. William C. Gannett.
Seven Studies of Temperance. For study in unity clubs, guilds, and older Sunday-school classes. By Rev. William C. Gannett. Price 10 cents.
A Hand-book of Temperance. By Rev. C. F. Dole. Price 10 cents.
Temperance Services and Hymns. Arranged by Rev. C. R. Eliot. Price 10 cents.
Total Abstinence League Cards. Card A is for total abstinence; card B includes tobacco.
The True Helpers' Membership Cards. (In colors.)
The True Helpers trying. (Plan for Children's Temperance Society, containing "Mary Elizabeth," a temperance story by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps.)

All of the above (and most of them for free distribution or postage only) may be obtained by addressing

The Unitarian Temperance Society,
25 Beacon Street, Boston.

NOT LOANED
Boston Young Men's Christian Union
September 11, 1907

WHAT CONVERTED ME.

I HAVE not always been a total abstainer. There was a time when I thought it right to use alcoholic drinks, as to-day the majority of civilized men probably use them, in moderation. I never had the slightest fear of using them in excess. I was not insensible, however, to the enormous evils of which the very name of the "intoxicating" liquors has come to stand as a reminder. It was not long before I was impressed with the fact that I was doing nothing in the least effective to counteract these evils. Indeed, so far as my influence counted at all, it went to encourage the use of these drinks, and by a well-known economic law to increase the demand for them. I found also, generally, that the moderate drinkers, however excellent their intentions were, did little, gave little, and sacrificed nothing to help make a more temperate world. I observed that, so far as gain had come in the drinking habits of mankind, nearly all actual cost and effort had been put forth by total abstainers. If it has now come to be the custom at a public dinner to turn down the glasses or to have no wines at all; if, in a multitude of homes, wine is no longer offered to young people,—this is no tribute to the "moderation" of those who use wine: it is simply because a large number of thoroughly respectable men have quite ceased to use wine. The nervously weak man, the man of hereditary tendencies to be a drunkard, finds no safe company with the men and women who offer him wine. It is only the men who let the wine alone who steady him to do the same.

Here, then, was a great moral question, profoundly affecting society and the State. On the one side, I was not even expressing my sympathy: I was only enjoying myself. On the other side was almost the sum total of the earnestness, the effort, the cost, and the humanity, measured in terms of

sympathy and sacrifice. I could not see the obvious evils of the drink habit any longer, without wishing to be counted on the side of the men and women who were doing something to overcome these evils. I therefore came over to the ranks of the total abstainers.

I happen to be one of those who require a reason or philosophy for what they do. If another can give a better reason for doing differently, I want to know what his reason is, and to go with him. What good reason could I give for being a total abstainer? It might be a good reason, to begin with, that, in view of the wretchedness, the want, and the tragedies which the drink habit brought, I did not "feel" like standing with the drinkers. What deeper reason might perhaps underlie this feeling? Could I justify it, so as to convert other men to feel likewise?

There appear to be two different grounds on which total abstainers stand. A large number of them seem to take what I shall call the "dogmatic" ground. They hold that alcohol, under all circumstances, is a poison, that the use of any drink that contains it is a sin, and that, therefore, the manufacture and sale of such drinks is a crime. They would add an eleventh commandment to the Decalogue, as Mahomet did, "Thou shalt not drink any intoxicating beverage." They are quite urgent to write their convictions into the laws, and to compel total abstinence by force upon all the world. Their millennium will come when no one shall desire to drink wine.

I sometimes wish that I knew as much as my friends, the dogmatic total abstainers. Their view seems to make the whole business delightfully simple. I confess, however, that I am unable yet to be as certain and confident as they are. I have a theory indeed that mankind, as we become civilized, is outgrowing such coarse, artificial stimulants as alcohol. New and higher moral laws and ideals come into sight from time to time, like the new principle, hardly yet fully recognized, against gambling. I can conceive an ideal world of total abstainers. But I can also conceive a pretty

good world in which every one had learned such self-control as to be able to take a glass of wine or ale on occasion, without the temptation to excess. There are already individuals and families, and possibly communities, of this character. There are comparatively temperate nations and races, like the Italians, with whom the wine question is not very serious, and who can hardly understand the idea of total abstinence. It is surely going to be a long time, if ever, before the Roman Catholic Church will declare that which stands in her sacrament as the royal symbol of joy, the making of which out of water at Cana of Galilee (as she holds) was her Master's great miracle, to be really the sign of mischief and sin.

Meanwhile the voices of science and medicine are not as pronounced and unanimous as we could wish. Even the moralists and philanthropists are not agreed. Indeed, a great committee has been lately organized, of scientific men, physicians, ministers, and educators, to study the subject of the alcoholic drinks, as though here were actually an open question, and as if, in the opinion of these eminent men, all the temperance teaching in the public schools were proceeding so far upon an uncertain foundation. In the face of all these facts I find myself unable to be a dogmatic total abstainer. I really do not know enough to act and to vote absolutely against the use of wine for all time and by all men. I do not dare to judge my neighbor, who conscientiously disagrees with me on this point, to be a sinner. I doubt my right to make laws against my German fellow-citizen's beer, before I have converted his conscience to my side. Even if I have a right to compel the minority the way of total abstinence, I seriously doubt whether I shall not be responsible for other evils, such as hypocrisy and contempt of the law, more subtle even than intemperance.

I have said all this as a decided and earnest total abstainer. The truth is, it is not necessary to be dogmatic, or to claim a word more than the facts warrant. I will illustrate my meaning as follows. I will suppose that there

is some article of diet — let it be mince-pie, if you please — which disagrees with several of my household. It may not disagree with the stronger stomachs. It may not hurt the people in the next house. The fact remains that, whenever we have it, some of us are ill, or at least cross and dejected. We might, however, still go on having our mince-pie. We might say that it was too important to give up. We might claim that no one needs to eat it to his own hurt. Let the weak stomachs refuse to touch it. Up to a certain point I should say this. Nevertheless, there would be a point where I think that we should vote to discontinue the pie. If the weak stomachs continued to be hurt, if the children were always trying painful experiments in order to see if they could not bear the pie diet, if the pie was really unimportant, and, in short, if the game proved not to be "worth the candle," we should give up having mince-pie. We should not pass upon the question of pie in our neighbor's house. We should not decide whether we were giving up our pie diet for all time. It would be enough for us if we made up our minds that for our household, and for the present, mince-pie was bad.

I hope that our illustration is not too trivial to show the practical principle, upon which we do not need to wait for the verdict of the experts or the moralists, in order to make up our minds upon the monster evil of the alcoholic drinks. We do not need to pass any opinion upon what the Italians or Frenchmen should do, or what men will do in the Golden Age. We do not need to prove that wine or beer always hurts the individual. Our problem is a social one. It is for American communities, and it is with reference to the immediate future. In this broad view, it is an admitted fact that, as regards waste and extravagance to the amount of hundreds of millions of dollars, as regards poverty, disease, domestic unhappiness, and cruel suffering of women and children, as regards crime, moral degradation, and political corruption, the American people have no habit so damaging on a vast scale to their vitality and their civilization as the use

of the intoxicating drinks. On the one hand is a tiny pleasure, mostly for the class who least need extra titillation of their palate or greater physical and nervous stimulus. On the other hand is a solemn and dreary weight of ills which almost every community is taxed to bear. Who will venture to claim here that "the game is worth the candle"?

This simple sort of consideration makes me a total abstainer. I will call it the provisional ground of total abstinence. It seems to me strong, reasonable, and practical. For as long a time to come as I can foresee, I hold that it will be a great and distinct evil for our American people to use the alcoholic drinks. Nothing but good can come from the rule of voluntary abstinence. For the many it will be for their own good, and for that of their wives and children. For the stronger and self-controlled it will be for the others' good; that is, the general good. In every case the slight sacrifice of a personal pleasure means nobler manhood.

In saying as much as this, I do not see why, for all right-minded, humane, and patriotic persons, I have not established a duty. Show me that any line of conduct, however innocent it seems to me, is on the whole socially injurious, and I am bound to give that conduct up. Show me that a certain line of conduct is beneficent to my neighbors and well for the State, and I am bound to make personal sacrifice, if necessary, to adopt that kind of conduct. My duty as a man to my brothers thus binds me over to take the side of the larger social good. Surely, it is hard to see how any one can be called a Christian in any sense of the word, who will not give up a personal indulgence which has proved to be generally hurtful to others. There is no need of elaborate proof that the use of the intoxicating drinks is vastly injurious. Why have we not here, then, the simplest form of a personal duty?

I am aware that some will say, "How will it do the drinking man any good that I give up my moderate glass of wine"? The answer is plain. It is a deep and general law: do thyself what thou wouldst advise others to do. I

would advise men generally, under present conditions, to give up the use of the intoxicating beverages. I scorn, then, to take an immunity from my own advice. What is more, this law works. The great group of moderate users of wine to-day set the fashion, not so much to moderation as towards drink. Does any one doubt, if only so many of these as are in the churches should go over to the side of total abstinence, that every slum and every drunkard's household in the land would feel the influence as of an incoming moral tide? The fact is, every one who drinks adds to the demand for drink. Every one who abstains cuts down the demand.

There are two brief reasons why I like the provisional ground for total abstinence. In the first place it adapts itself with elasticity to different conditions in imposing restraints on the liquor traffic. The dogmatic total abstainer sees but one method; namely, prohibition. But we provisional total abstainers are opportunists. We are ready for prohibition, as by local option, wherever the public opinion of any town or city makes this method a just and truthful expression of the popular will. We are equally prepared, without sacrifice of principle, where we have not yet converted public opinion our way, to join hands, as in the use of the Norwegian method, for any plan that promises to mitigate the evils of the drink traffic. We are ready to be "dogmatic" total abstainers as soon as the evidence persuades us. But, on the other hand, whatever the experts report after their experiments as to the action of alcohol on the stomachs of Guinea pigs, we have plenty of evidence for our present position.

The other special reason why I like our provisional argument is that it appeals distinctly to honorable, chivalrous, and patriotic youth. I would rather not say to high-minded men, "You must be total abstainers." I do not like to appeal to their fears for themselves. I prefer to appeal to their generosity and good-will. "Will you not practise yourselves a rule which, for one generation at least, it would be well for America if all her sons practised?"